

# MISSOURI CONSERVATION SHOWCASE

## Quick NRCS Response Eases Fears of Farmers, Homeowners After Levee Break



*Gary Eddy, levee district chair, left, stands with Butler County farmer Ferdie Reed on the newly repaired levee.*

**B**utler County farmer Ferdie Reed watched as workers closed a 250-foot hole in the levee protecting his home and cropland, and he breathed a sigh of relief.

“I can’t believe this is being fixed so fast,” Reed said. “I was afraid that this hole would be open for three or four months.”

Instead, thanks to the Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) program administered by the USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), the April 13 levee break near Poplar Bluff that flooded about 20,000 acres of cropland, invaded 150 homes and threatened 550 more was repaired within two weeks.

Harold Deckerd, NRCS assistant state conservationist, said EWP funds can be used to repair levees, remove sediment from drainage ditches and streams, remove logjams, and stabilize streambanks. Normally, Congress must approve funding for specific floods. That is a process that can take months. But when lives are in danger, the process is much quicker.

“The national office keeps money on hand for exigencies, and that’s where this money came from,” Deckerd said. He said EWP will pay 75 percent of the \$90,000 repair. The local sponsor, the North Inter-River Drainage District, is responsible for the other 25 percent of the costs.

The project involved using 20,000 cubic yards of soil to replace the 250-foot hole in the nine-foot-tall levee at Bar Ditch and County Road 606, and to repair an eight-foot-deep, 450-foot-long scour hole. The damage was caused by heavy rains that raised the water level in the Black River, which backed up into and flooded Bar Ditch. The levee breached at a low spot where the county road crosses it.

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“The levee failed April 13, our first site visit was April 17, we had funding confirmation from Washington on April 22 and we were working on the levee on April 25,” said John Hester, an NRCS water management engineer located at nearby Dexter. Within a week, the drainage district had completed the work, under the supervision of NRCS.

“Time was a major factor,” said Michelle Gross, NRCS district conservationist in Butler County. “People were scared to death of another rain, and they didn’t know what to do. They relied on NRCS to guide them.

“Everyone in the field office pitched in and tried to get information and coordinate with Inter-River.”

Gary Eddy, levee district chair, said he was pleased with the process, and the result. “I appreciate all that NRCS did. They really came to our rescue here,” he said.

Reed said the floodwaters covered his farm and yard, and almost made it into his house. With the levee repaired, he can plant his soybean fields with the confidence that the levee is there to protect them.

“I’m just glad it’s getting fixed so quickly,” he said as he watched the repair in progress. Probably each of the 700 homeowners and about 200 farmers who rely on the levee for protection would agree.

Hester said the project was a good example of a program designed to quickly help people in times of need.

“That’s the way it’s supposed to work,” he said. They needed to get it done.”

*Written by Charlie Rahm, NRCS, May 2008*

*For more information about EWP or NRCS programs, contact the NRCS office serving your county, or access this website:  
[www.mo.nrcs.usda.gov/programs](http://www.mo.nrcs.usda.gov/programs).*



**Before repairs:** The damage above was caused by heavy rains that raised the water level in the Black River, which backed up into and flooded Bar Ditch. The levee breached at a low spot where the county road crosses it.



**After repairs:** The project involved using 20,000 cubic yards of soil to replace the 250-foot hole in the nine-foot-tall levee at Bar Ditch and County Road 606, and to repair an eight-foot-deep, 450-foot-long scour hole.

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